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SUBJECT: BELIZE: 2006 TIP REPORT DEMARCHE DELIVERED

REF: A) STATE 85511; B) BELIZE 403

1. (SBU) Per reftel, post delivered, on June 5, report and talking points to CEO Ambassador Amalia Mai and U.N. Desk Officer Alphonso Gahona of Belize Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Together with the report, PolOff presented the 60-day mini-plan. Mai's reaction was polite but muted; she noted, with reference to the recent USTR Special 301 Watch List demarche, that as of late there had not been much good news from the USG for Belize. Mai said that she would brief the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director of the National Anti-TIP Committee on Wednesday June 7. Director of the Belize National Anti-TIP Committee Ambassador Dolores Balderamos-Garcia has not yet responded to PolOff's requests for a meeting.

2. (SBU) The local media has given considerable coverage to the release of the 2006 TIP Report. Utilizing Reftel A press guidance, PolOff has taken numerous press calls from several Belizean media outlets. Local media reports noted that in 2003 Belize had been ranked at Tier 3. Additionally, some local press outlets noted that insufficient action by the Government of Belize had been one reason for the ranking.

3. (U) Thus far there have been several TV, radio and newspaper articles regarding the TIP report, including:

A. On Tuesday, June 6, Channel Five evening news' lead story was "U.S. Castigates Belize for `Trafficking in Persons.'" Channel Five's anchorwoman had interviewed PolOff for the story.

B. The same evening, Channel 7 also carried a brief story entitled "U.S. Gives Belize Thumbs Down for Human Trafficking." The story noted that "The Government [of Belize] has enacted laws, empowered a task force, performed raids, charged traffickers. all that but the U.S. State Department says this country is not doing enough to curb human trafficking." Channel 7 also commented that "two fierce opponents of the United States" are also on the list - Venezuela and Cuba.

C. On Wednesday, June 7, LoveFM radio interviewed PolOff and Ambassador Dolores Balderamos-Garcia. Balderamos-Garcia stated that she was "disappointed but not surprised" by Belize's ranking. She also cited the recent positive step Belize has made by joining the Latin American Network for Missing Persons.

D. On the Wednesday, June 7, the Prime Minister addressed the issue on the Channel Five evening news. Giving his thoughts on why Belize was ranked Tier 3, the PM stated:

"That Belize is now lumped and almost put in a box, so to speak, with Venezuela and Cuba; I don't think its pure coincidence. Because, when you analyze the issue of human trafficking, we have done a lot in this country to address the issue. Police, the immigration, people have raided constantly in addressing this issue of prostitution for instance and the whole question of human trafficking we've done a lot. But those who seek to judge us should perhaps examine their own decadent societies before they come and pass judgment on us."

1E. On the June 8 LoveFM morning news, Carmen Zetina, Director of Immigration, gave an interview stating that the Belize Department of Immigration is committed in the fight against trafficking in persons and that they are grateful for assistance from the U.S. Government (USG) noting the USG sponsored machine readable passport (MRP) program. Zetina went on to state that Immigration's IT Unit is working on a nationwide network to track incidents of human trafficking and other immigration offenses.

1F. On Thursday, June 8, a weekly newspaper (The Reporter) ran an article entitled "Belize Not Doing Enough to Stop Human Trafficking." The article cited the Prime Minister's speculation from the previous evening's news that Belize's ranking is in part due to its relations with Venezuela and Cuba. The article also noted PolOff's statement that the formal report to the U.S. Congress on Global Trafficking was not in response to relationships Belize may have with other nations.

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